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ABSTRACT

The question in English-As-Second-Language (ESL) classrooms is not whether a teaching method is good or not, but whether the teacher knows how, for what purpose, for what kind of students, and in what language situation a particular method is used to enhance learning effectively. In teaching English to Chinese students at Xi'an Foreign Language University (China), a teacher considered several factors (age, level of proficiency, native language, place where English was taught, and motivation) in choosing methods. The teacher's perception of the purpose of teaching (to enable students to acquire strong linguistic competence in the shortest possible time) also influenced the decision about teaching method. One method chosen was the audiolingual method. The grammar-translation method is also good for promoting language proficiency among students, and the advantages of using this method with Chinese ESL learners are: (1) teachers can bring to the students' attention the conceptual differences between English and Chinese; and (2) translation in the classroom is both economic and effective in explaining a concept. Another approach to grammar rules, the total physical response approach, is also described. When beginning adult ESL learners, the emphasis should be placed on listening and speaking because these skills can help them practice new vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar rules. Pattern drill exercises help students to acquire the basic skills, especially patterns. Teachers should take time to analyze criticisms associated with various teaching methods before actually choosing one. Methods should be chosen from the most mechanical to the most communicative. (Contains ii references.) (JP)

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ED 366 179

# My Personal Philosophy in Teaching English as a Second Language: Some Methods I Used in Teaching English to Chinese Freshmen in Xi'an Foreign Language University

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## Introduction

The past references to methodologies in teaching English as a second language often revealed different philosophies in language teaching. Such diverse philosophies can also be seen in teachers' selections of textbooks, supplementary materials, classroom activities, and particularly, teaching methods. For instance, some teachers prefer the natural method to grammar-translation because in their view grammar-translation does not promote effective learning since its major focus is on "committing words to memory, translating sentences, drilling irregular verbs, later memorizing, repeating and applying grammatical rules with their exceptions, (Bowen, Madsen, & Hilferty, 1985, p.19)," and thus resulted in "inefficiency of instruction" and , "limited oral proficiency," whereas the natural method gives its full attention to oral activity. Like the grammar-translation method, after it had enjoyed its popularity for a little while, the natural method lost its supremacy and was accused of its "lack of system" and its "heavy demands on teachers to create their own teaching procedures (Bowen, Madsen, & Hilferty, 1985, p. 22)."

Usually, it was those flawed sides of each method that stimulated methodologists and teachers to search for new and better ways of teaching. As a result,

> one method has succeeded another in official favor: grammar-translation gave way to the direct method, which was in turn followed by the reading approach. Then came the Second World War, which brought with it the so-called army method that under conditions of peace became the audio-lingual approach. This audio-lingual approach-or the aural-oral method as it was sometimes called -- enjoyed almost uncontested supremacy in the United Sates, and I believe also in many Latin American countries, through 1950s and 1960s. But no more (Prator, in Croft,

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1980, p. 13).

Rather than reviewing their failings, this paper is, however, intended to explore how some of the commonly-felt out-of-fashion methods can be positively applied in an ESL/EFL classroom. According to my own experience, there are no methods that are absolutely good or bad. Even the long neglected grammar-translation method has its strengths that can be used to facilitate teaching. The question, I think, is not whether a method is good or not, but whether the teacher knows how, for what purpose, for what kind of students, and in what language situation a particular method is used to enhance learning effectively. Therefore, in my opinion, good teachers should be able to select as well as to blend the methods available to him/her to fit his/her own purpose.

## In Choosing a Method

Before choosing a method, the teacher should first know the purpose of teaching, that is, what teaching tasks s/he intends to fulfill within a designed project, or a period of time -- a class period, a week, a lesson, a semester, a course, or even the whole four-year college program. Then the teacher should decide how those purposes can be best achieved in accordance with the affective factors such as students' age, level of proficiency, native language, where the second language (ESL) or the foreign language (EFL) is taught, and their motivation. Finally, the teacher should design a suitable strategy or strategies and choose the proper method or methods accordingly. I applied the following analysis to my students in China:

**Age: 18 -- 21.** The students I taught at Xi'an Foreign Language University were all native Chinese high school graduates. Having passed the national entrance examinations, they were admitted by the university and were randomly divided into different classes, with about 18 students in each.

**Level of Proficiency:** Beginning level. But this does not mean that they would start from

zero. They all had had some English classes in high school and generally knew about 1500 English words and the chief tenses and other syntactic structures. Mostly, their reading skills were a lot better than their speaking, listening, and writing skills, owing to the way they were taught in high school.

**Native Language:** Chinese, which means that until they came to the university, their courses, including their English courses, were taught in no language other than Chinese.

**Place Where English Was Taught:** Home country, China, where the native language is the only official language. Most students had hardly heard English spoken by native speakers, except on TV or Cassettes.

**Motivation:** Those students were basically trained to be professional instructors for advanced high school English classes, translators, interpreters for foreign trade and other affairs, and editors. But in their first and second academic years, all were required to have a solid command of the four skills within the range of about three thousand words and basic grammar elements. Those who failed to pass the qualification examinations at the end of their second year would not be allowed to proceed to finish their four-year program and, therefore, would not be able to enter the profession they chose.

Given the above factors, the following were considered necessary principles.

1. Since they were all adults, already passed puberty, and their speech organs were no longer as flexible as children's, they would need a lot of mechanical practice to train their organs of speech and hearing, so as to improve their speaking and listening abilities.

2. Although neither formal instruction nor conscious grammar explanation has much

positive effect on children, research findings show that adults do benefit more from formal instruction as well as grammar explanation (Eisenstein, p. 286). Therefore, systematic grammar teaching was considered an important part of the curriculum at the beginning.

3. Since their native language is Chinese, a system which differs significantly from that of English, catching the new sounds and identifying varied meaningful concepts, was almost as difficulty for them as producing the sounds. In order for them to acquire communicative ability and language fluency, they also needed a lot of opportunities to practice listening comprehension ability.

4. All of the students were beginners with little practice in reading and writing and little knowledge of grammar learned in middle school. Therefore, methods chosen had to be appropriate for their level, so that they would not feel bored because they could not meet with the necessary challenge, or overwhelmed because they could hardly follow the activities. Attention had to be constantly given to helping them learn new things through refreshing and deepening their old knowledge. Fortunately, teaching at this stage usually does not involve many abstract academic concepts but more concrete everyday communication situations, the teaching of which often needs practical demonstrative aids. This, in fact, is an advantage for the teachers of beginning students, for one has a lot to do other than lectures.

5. All of the students had a high motivation to learn English although their career goal varied from person to person. They all had a very positive attitude towards their L2. Therefore, they would accept any teaching method I was going to use so long as they felt it could help them learn. They sometimes expected a little too much from their teachers which was an encouraging challenge to me. For me, the only thing I would need to consider was to live up to their expectations rather than worry about other things, such as to keep up attendance -- it was never a problem.

However, methods were also selected according to my perception of the purpose of teaching as well as my personal philosophy about learning. In an article recently published in TESOL Quarterly, Diane Larsen-Freeman (1991) claimed that it is almost impossible for most adult learners to have a complete mastery of the L2. This does not mean that nobody can achieve a native-like fluency in a L2. Some can get very good and a few may even be indistinguishable from native speakers in their mastery of the L2. However, according to Larsen-Freeman, "for most, some aspects of their IL [Interlanguage] will likely fossilize before acquisition is complete, and for all (nearly all?), there appears to be a physiologically determined critical period for pronunciation (1991, p. 336)." Therefore, teachers should do their best to "encourage learners to go as far as they are capable of going in the L2."

What Diane Larsen-Freeman has claimed is also how I perceive the purpose of my teaching task. My purpose is to enable the students to acquire a strong linguistic competence in a shortest possible time. Unlike children who can spend their lifetime learning and practicing a language, adult ESL/EFL learners have a time limit. In China, a college student in a foreign language program usually studies for four years and some only stay for two years. Therefore, we had to teach them the most basic but the most important skills and parts of the language so that they could use those skills as a basis for further self-improvement after their graduation.

I perceive learning a foreign language as forming a set of new habits. This is just like learning to play sports. When you learn to play basketball, you learn to do certain actions in order to shoot accurately. Then you start to learn to play ping pong and you learn a different set of actions in order to hit and receive the ball correctly. However, most people were not born with the best habits of movement to be professional players. In order to be either a good basketball player or a good ping pong player, one needs to practice, practice, and practice until one has corrected his/her inborn but unscientific habits of movement and formed the scientifically required habits as if one were born with them. That is, one is able to respond correctly to a stimuli automatically while playing in a game. However, if one has not formed the correct habit of shooting or hitting the ball, to correct the error would be a tedious job for the coach and painful experience for the

player, and more so should the person start training later than a certain age. Besides, for adult learners, although some errors, after substantial effort, will disappear, some will remain. It is actually much easier to teach a set of new, correct habits than to correct a set of established, incorrect habits. Therefore, teaching is helping the students to acquire a set of correct habits before their errors become fossilized. Based on this assumption, every teaching method I used in class was chosen to help, to the greatest extent, strengthen the new habits.

**The Audiolingual Method**

Taking the students' ages, levels of proficiency, native language, motivation, and my purpose of teaching into consideration, the audiolingual method seems to be the most appropriate to start with. This method views language as a set of habits. Therefore, ". . . what is needed is practice that will gradually force them to use language examples that contain the problem. This will engage the habit mechanism and more quickly establish new habits (Paulston, in Croft, 1972, p. 150)." Pattern drills are designed to train students on basic grammatical structures such as basic word order, verb tenses, auxiliary verbs, modal auxiliaries, passive voice to name just a few. The purpose of this part is to allow students to form correct speaking habits. The underlying assumption is that by providing lots of practice and opportunities to speak English in class, the students will acquire the habits, that is they will become capable of identifying the meaning-structure rules in effective communication and totally comfortable with receiving and producing them as naturally.

The pattern drills I designed for my class fell coincidentally into Paulston's categorization. According to Paulston, there are three kinds of drills: mechanical drills; meaningful drills; and communication drills. A mechanical drill is one where there is complete control of the response, and there is only one correct way of responding. Substitutional drills also belong to this category. For example, to show the students that to express the meaning that something exists at a certain place, the pattern "There is" should be used. A pattern drill of this type would look like the

following:

There is a -- book on the table.

There is a -- pencil on the table.

There is a -- dictionary on the table.

While doing the exercise, the teacher should leave the first part of the drill unchanged. Only the second part, the position held by the noun, is replaced by another noun given by the teacher. This is done to dispel the confusion as to what the students are supposed to substitute. A technique that I often used was to give the students an example first to let them listen so that they could catch the right sounds. Then I would conduct the exercise all the way through once until I thought they were somewhat familiar with pattern. Having done this in chorus, some students might take advantage and neglect their duty. So, I would always check on each individual after the group work to make sure that everybody was working.

The purpose in doing this drill is to train the students' ability to manipulate linguistic tasks. As the students' abilities increase, the tasks will become more difficult. For example, the teacher can ask the students to change the prepositional phrases, a task which requires the students' ability to manipulate more elements in the sentence.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher: | a book on the chair. |
| Students: | There is a book on the chair. |
| Teacher: | a pencil in her pencilbox. |
| Students: | There is a pencil in her pencilbox. |
| Teacher: | a dictionary in his desk. |
| Students: | There is a dictionary in his desk. |

Mechanical drills are extremely helpful to beginning adult learners, especially Chinese students.

Chinese students are usually shy about speaking in class and they don't want others to hear their mistakes. Doing mechanical drills in chorus can help them overcome such fears and also can force them to open their mouthes. Individual checkup is followed only when the teacher sees that the students have somewhat already mastered the pattern. Since this kind of drill is mechanical, it is boring. Therefore, the teacher should not use it for too long; ten to fifteen minutes would be long enough.

Seeing that the students have already mastered the skills, the teacher should then move to the next step, the meaningful drills. This differs from the mechanical drill because in conducting this drill, the teacher gives cues to the students with answers:

Teacher: Dr. Ward is in her office.
Student 1: Where is Dr. Ward?
Student 2: Dr. Ward is in her office.

Student 1 has certain options in constructing meaningful language, but his/her question must be appropriate to the cue. Student 2 is only involved in a mechanical repetition drill, but he/she does give a formal completion of the dialogue. This practice helps the students with their listening comprehension. They cannot complete the drill without understanding what has been said. In the use of meaningful drills, there is still some control or response but it may be expressed in more than one way. So it is not suitable for chorus drilling.

As the students successfully progress, the teacher should give them more freedom to speak. Therefore, communicative drills are conducted where there is no control of response. Students are free to choose to say what they want to say. In conducting this kind of drills, I usually asked my students questions of authentic interest and I also expected authentic answers from them. For example: I asked:

Teacher: How many people are there in your family, Zhong?

Zhong: There are four people in my family.

Teacher: Who are they?

Zhong: My father, my mother, my sister, and me.

Teacher: What do your parents do?

Zhong: My father is an engineer and my mother is a middle school teacher.

Teacher: What does your mother teach?

Zhong: She teaches math.

Teacher: Is your sister also a college student?

Zhong: No, she is a nurse at No. Four People's Hospital in Xi'an.

Teacher: How old is your sister (It's quite alright to ask people's age in China)?

Zhong: She is twenty-four years old and she just got married.

Teacher: Congratulations!

What should be mentioned here is that since a conversation like this is only a model for the students to follow, it should not exceed five minutes. Otherwise, other students will get bored for not being able to participate in the activity. We must always be aware that whatever activity we present in class, that activity should involve every student. This not only allows more practice per student within a limited period of time but also makes the classroom atmosphere livelier and inspiring. One very effective way I found to achieve this purpose was to pair the students up, assign them to different linguistic tasks, and let them talk to each other. Students in my class often got very excited because it made them see that what they had said made sense to others. It was really an encouraging experience for both the teacher and the students.

I must also mention that when we did the drills, it was better to do them in an orderly progression, that is, they should be from mechanical to communicative. Do not skip any of the steps. Every step is important for each paves the way for the next.

Emphasis on listening and speaking at the initial stage can help the students practice new vocabulary, new sentence structures, and new grammar rules, and, therefore, establish new habits,

which later, can promote reading and writing. Furthermore, this basic training in skills can lay a solid foundation not only for the students' later studies but also for them to acquire necessary communication abilities. It is hard to imagine that the students can communicate in the target language if they cannot even open their mouthes or ears to the signals sent by a native speaker.

However, this does not mean that we should neglect reading and writing. To strengthen the students' reading and writing abilities, we must modify the audiolingual method in such a way that it blends reading and writing with listening and speaking, not to treat them separately as the traditional audiolingualists did. One criticism of audiolingual method is that the teacher does not allow the students to open their books for as long as a semester. My experience is that the teacher should not go to extreme. I usually let my students read after one or two drills. I let them open their books to read the grammar part to see if they had any questions. The purpose was to give them time to think and digest the new knowledge they had just learned. Then I would hand out a short story containing the grammar items as a supplementary reading material with some comprehension questions presented at the end. This was to check their reading ability.

After much listening, speaking, and reading, the students are ready for the last important task: writing. I think writing is a gradual process, going from simple to more complex, from controlled to uncontrolled. Usually I would have them do the simple, controlled writing first. This often included taking a dictation of some specific patterned drills previously learned. This early writing served to reinforce the students' memory by adding hand training to that of ear, tongue, and eye. The writing was always controlled within the framework of what the students had already practiced in the previous classes. The purpose was to ensure mastery of the earlier audiolingual materials.

In addition, I also provided some Chinese sentences for the students to translate into English. The purpose of this was to bring their attention to the differences between the Chinese language and the English language and to avoid Chinglish.

After drilling "There is," I wrote the following sentences on the blackboard.

1. 桌上有一台計算机。 (There is a computer on the table.)
2. 墙上有张画。 (There is a picture on the wall.)
3. 屋里有一个书架。 (There is a bookcase in the room.)
4. 房子里有一辆自行車。 (There is a bicycle in the house.)

Sometimes I collected the translation and corrected their errors. Sometimes I let the students exchange their writing and correct each other's errors in class. Errors made due to the influence of their mother tongue were also corrected so that the students could see where they were wrong and why. According to Childers (1964), such writing can be used as a good evaluation of the students' linguistic development in two ways. First, it gives the teacher a clear idea of how much and how well the students had learned. Second, it also indicates the overall ability of the student to present and express his/her ideas.

Later, writing was expanded to having the students rewrite a dialogue taking place in a real situation. For example, in the post office, or in a shop. The students were directed to change tenses, or persons, in a model paragraph and rewrite the whole. The emphasis was always on complete and correct learning of meaningful phrases. This kind of exercise helped the students to use their knowledge creatively while still being controlled.

After the students had gone through the controlled writing, they were asked to construct a piece of their own creatively. They were supposed to demonstrate their ability by using all what they had learned in their previous lessons including vocabulary, expressions and phrases, and grammar rules to form a short composition with simple ideas. For example: one student , while describing the classroom, wrote this in class in 1980:

> This is our classroom. There are eighteen chairs and desks in the classroom. My desk is in the middle of the classroom. The teacher's desk is in front of the blackboard. There are two slogans on the wall. One is at the back and says: "Be red and expert." The other is between the windows. It says: "Never forget class

struggle!" I love my class. We all study hard.

Although the controlled and uncontrolled writing is blended with reading and drill practice in one class period, uncontrolled writing comes only when the students have learned the whole lesson including patterns, texts, grammar rules, and the vocabulary. However, audiolingual method is not the only method that can be used to serve this purpose. Different language elements and items require different teaching methods. The following methods are also good for beginning students in promoting their language proficiency.

**The Grammar-Translation Method**

According to the grammar-translation method, classes can be taught in the students' native language. Vocabulary lists, printed grammar rules, and sample sentences are provided for the students to translate. Students are asked to memorize verb paradigms and exceptions to grammar rules. "And not to be overlooked was the esthetic argument: Language learning could be intimately entertwined with some of the most beautiful and profound literature of the ages, thus avoiding the plastic and vapid contexts (decried by contemporary ESL experts such as Widdowson 1981, and Oller 1984) that plague us even in the latter decades of the twentieth century (Bowen, Madsen, & hilferty, p. 20)."

There are several advantages of using grammar translation with Chinese EFL learners. First of all, grammar translation can cut down on chances that some students, when trying to express themselves in English, are likely to produce Chinglish. Therefore, it is important to let them know how the same meaning expressed in one language can differ significantly in the other language. For example, in Chinese we have the same word for "open," "turn on," and "drive." Many students are easily tricked into saying "Open the car," instead of "Drive the car." "Open the light" instead of "Turn on the light," etc.. Therefore, from the very beginning, the teacher should bring the students' attention to the conceptual differences in the two languages and to help them establish correct concepts in English, so that they learn from the beginning to think and

communicate idiomatically.

Secondly, I find that doing a little bit of translation and using students' native language in class, if appropriately, is both economic and effective in explaining a concept. For example, if we try to explain the meaning of the word 'electricity" in English, we would say, according to The American Heritage Dictionary (1985, 2nd ed.), that electricity is "The class of physical phenomena arising from the existence and interactions of electric charge." In an even more wordy manner, Webster's Newworld Dictionary defines the word "electricity as " a property of certain fundamental particles of all matter, as electrons (negative charges) and protons or positrons (positive changes): electric charge is generated by friction, induction, or chemical change (1987)." Both of the explanations present more difficult new words than the word "electricity" itself. The underlined words are obviously far beyond the students' current comprehension ability. It is quite plain that to help the students understand such a lengthy explanation is the most time-consuming and least effective. But if we use the students' native language as an aid, this dilemma will be solved immediately. Therefore, whenever a situation like this occurs, I would not hesitate to use the students' native language regardless of what some of the methodologists will say. I either put the Chinese word "电" for "electricity" on the blackboard or I tell my students in Chinese. This, I think, saves much time in class for other activities. Of course, we should not use L1 improperly to cause the students to feel that English is just like Chinese.

Third, an appropriate proportion of direction of translation and the utilization of the students' native language in an ESL/EFL class is helpful because some of the students might become translators in the future and they need to learn to do translations. Even for those who will not become translators, translation, if used properly, will help them in learning a second language, for languages have many aspects in common and a knowledge of one should have positive effect on acquisition of another as shown above. The question is not whether translation should be used or not. It is how much and when it should be used positively so that it can enhance the skills of another language. In order to be able to make a fair judgement, the teacher must have a strong professional competence.

Many methodologists are strongly against grammar translation. Actually, the methodologists are just doing their job, which is to provide us with sufficient alternatives in the concerned area, but making the decision is left to us teachers. It's just like when you are in a department store, where there are a lot of merchandise for you to choose with different brands and different prices, you then choose the ones that are appealing to your taste after you consider questions like for what occasion, for whom, the price , the color, and the quality etc.. Nobody says that you must use the audiolingual method or the natural method. When methodologists and linguists present a list of strengths and weaknesses of each method, they do not mean that the newer the better although some perhaps are better under certain conditions. They mean to warn us not just to see the strengths. Some methods have more shortcomings than others. So, when we use them, we should make modifications so that they can complement each other to fit our purposes.

**The Total Physical Response Approach (TPR)**

Another method which is also very effective in teaching some of the grammar rules to beginning EFL/ESL students is called the total physical response approach. Developed by James Asher (Savignon, 1987, p. 25), a psychologist, the TPR is based on the following assumptions:

1. Comprehension first, production second.
2. Comprehension can be visualized by means of bodily movements.
3. Delaying speech production promotes learning because it reduces the learners' anxiety.

I used this method when I introduced some grammar rules. For example, when I introduced the present continuous tense to show the students how an action in progress was expressed in English by tense, I would introduce this new tense in this way:

Teacher: I am standing. You are sitting.

I am speaking. You are listening.

Then I asked a student to read a paragraph in the text and say:"S/he is reading." Later, I would ask the students to form into groups of three with one giving directions to the other and ask the third student a question. Then the third student would answer the question by using the present progressive tense.

Example:

S1 to S2: Sing a song.

(S2 now is singing.)

S1 to S3: What is S2 doing?

S3: S/he is singing.

TPR method was also good in teaching imperative structures. What the teacher can do is to have students listen to a command with the teacher modeling the physical response, and then the students will act alone upon the command. After some time the students can do rather complicated tasks such as "Come to the front, pick up the eraser, clean the blackboard, put down the eraser, go back to your seat, and sit down."

TPR lessons are at first teacher-oriented. However, they later involve students in active interactions. When the students feel ready to speak, they begin to give directions to others, and everyone in turn assumes the role of speakers as well as that of active listener. The advantage of this method is that by successfully carrying out the commands, students quickly recognize the need and usefulness of the form of verb patterns. Besides, since imperatives serve as the basis for the "Language of instruction, they have immediate educational relevance." Patricial L. McEldowney provides a further rationale for the teaching of imperatives and says "as one of the finite verb forms, they account for sizable amount of all verb usage (qt. in Croft, 1980, p. 330)." However,

this method is not suitable for students at a higher level, where explanations of more complex and abstract concepts are constantly involved.

**Conclusion**

The above methods are not all I used in my class. They are just examples to show how each method can supplement the other. Other methods such as the natural method, suggestopedia, and the communicative approach to name just a few were also used depending on different situations, instructional materials, language items to be taught, and the students' proficiency levels. It is definitely wrong to say that one method is bad simply because it is out of date. The three methods I mentioned in this paper all have their strengths and weaknesses. Countless practices have proved that they are effective only in classrooms where students' English proficiency level is low. They are not recommended to teachers whose students are at independent level. Both the audiolingual and the TPR methods require that the teacher have very good comand of the target language as well as language teaching skills. Although the grammar translation method seems to be helpful in some cases in solving some linguistic problems, it should not be used too often. The following represents a summarization of my experiences already discussed in this paper:

First, when teaching beginning adult ESL/EFL learners, the emphasis should be placed on listening and speaking because listening and speaking can help them practice new vocabulary, new sentence structures, and new grammar rules, which then can enhance reading and writing. Furthermore, this basic training can lay not only a solid foundation for further studies, but also for future communication purposes.

However, although at the beginning stage, listening and speaking are important, reading and writing are also important. Many people, including native speakers, can speak well but do not really write well. Since our purpose is to empower the students to be linguistically competent in all of the four areas, reading and writing should not be neglected till very late. Therefore, the order of instruction should be "listening/speaking closely followed by reading/writing." This philosophy

should be evident in selecting classroom activities, exercises, and particularly, instructional methods.

Second, we must realize that to promote an intuitive grasp of the target language and the ability to give automatic responses in a natural communicative situation does require one's conscious learning of the basic skills, especially patterns. Therefore, the advantage of pattern drill exercises is that they provide ample opportunities for the students to gradually possess the required skills. Although some methodologists say that students want time to find, on their own, the required word or phrase, therefore, they need time to reflect, I think we should be more realistic about the matter. The problem here is that the students have not stored enough words and phrases that are needed for communication, or to fulfil a linguistic task, no matter how hard they try and how much time they give to search for the "required word or phrase," the result would be that they would never be able to find it because the word or phrase they are looking for has never really existed in their brain. In addition, a student who is well trained through drill practice, in responding to a speaker, can soon eliminate the process of translating the speaker's English into his/her mother tongue in order to understand what has been said first, and then start to search for words, patterns, and, according to grammar rules, put them into an English sentence. Not many people will have the patience to enjoy a conversation in a natural communication situation with someone who spends such a long time in producing one sentence, which may bear a possibility to be wrong and, thus hinder the listener's comprehension. I believe that both of the speakers from the first expect each other to make the conversation move smoothly. Therefore, when teachers design curriculum for a group of adult learners, they should take this fact into serious consideration.

Third, teachers should take time to analyze some criticisms when choosing a method. For example, V.J. Cook (qt. in Paulston, in Croft, 1972, p. 151) have criticized the audiolingual method and have said that "one point which does emerge from this framework is the extremely limited number of operations that the learner has to perform in a structure drill . . . (Croft, p. 155)." While what she said might be true, she failed to consider the students' proficiency level

when she made the statement. How can a beginner run when s/he hasn't learned how to walk? As a matter of fact, it is the mastery of this limited number of operations that will make the future unlimited number of operations possible.

Fourth, methods should be chosen from the most mechanical to the most communicative. Without substantial mechanical training as a basis, students participation in further communication is impossible. Those who were trained systematically, as with an audiolingual method, do speak more automatically and accurately because many sentences such as "My name is Zhong, and what's your name?" "This is my book. Where is yours?" are ready-made. All they need to do is to pull them out whenever necessary. This makes communication a lot easier and smoother than letting the students think, search for the right pattern, then fit the right words into the right pattern. It is much more time-consuming in this way than just to teach them the pattern drills. Only after some time, when the students have mastered certain rules of speaking, certain words to use, and certain structures to fit in, can they be quite free to be creative, to express their own ideas, and then to communicate as they see fit. Without the basic linguistic competence, communicative competence is impossible.

Finally, I would like to quote Larsen-Freeman (1991) in concluding my paper. She says:

> The learning/acquisition process is complex. As has been evident throughout this review, simple solutions have evaded researchers for more than 20 years; I would not expect them in the future. There are many complex elements in the SLA puzzle. It is probable that acquisition/learning is not monolithic and that there are multiple subprocesses, multiple routes, and multiple causes. Teachers, therefore, cannot seek simplistic solutions. As Spolsky (1988) has written: "Any intelligent and disinterested observer knows that there are many ways to learn languages and many ways to teach them, and that some ways work with some students in some circumstances and fail with others. (This is why good language teachers are and always have been eclectic . . . .) (p. 336).

"Remember that what is new is not necessarily better (Prator, in Croft, 1980, p. 17)." Therefore, my suggestion is:"Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater."

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